

**Housing Studies Managing Editors' statement: connecting research, policy and practice, with sustainable social, economic, and environmental outcomes (editorial)**

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## **Housing Studies Managing Editors' Statement: connecting research, policy and practice, with sustainable social, economic, and environmental outcomes**

The aim of *Housing Studies* as a leading international journal is to be a major forum for theoretical and analytical developments in the housing field. *Housing Studies* furthermore aims to contribute to knowledge that informs and shapes housing policies, practices; and housing in urban development strategies. For us, as a new team of managing editors, this includes actionable knowledge for systems of housing that create more affordable, equitable, and sustainable housing outcomes, for all.

The 'right to adequate housing' goes back to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 25.1). The 'right to housing' is commonly understood as relating to the universal entitlement to decent and affordable housing as well as to issues of housing security – fulfilment of these requirements turns houses into homes. The right to housing asserts the status of 'housing as home' as a human basic need, an absolute capability that not only provides shelter, but also enables individuals to function as a social person (i.e., with dignity and without shame) in society. Housing, therefore, not only constitutes a human right, but also an important societal infrastructure.

As often noted in this journal, housing does not just provide all-important housing services. Across the globe, houses are capital-intensive commodities. Housing has become an important asset class, leveraged for wider investment and welfare purposes. Housing needs, provision, and finance became more intertwined, constituting vital parts of our economies in diverse ways as exemplified by the Global Financial Crisis (2007-09) and its aftermath. However, markets do not exist without states and a right to housing for all necessitates a substantial commitment to non-market provision, usually in the form of housing-related social policies such as social or non-profit housing, or various forms of income support. Housing, therefore, constitutes an important part of the political economy of nations.

These old insights take on new urgency as climate change and conflict (one often reinforcing the other) produce new challenges. Challenges that also intensify the impacts of longer-term processes such as migration, rising income and wealth inequality, or the destruction of First Nations' spiritual connection to land, culture, and sovereignty through housing and urban development processes across the globe. Sustainable development, in its' many definitions, has become key. Integrating sustainable development in housing studies research is no easy task. However, the centrality of housing as a fundamental human right, a social infrastructure and a political-economic infrastructure offers opportunities to connect these different levels. Housing's centrality is also an opportunity and a lever to achieve even broader societal transitions.

The housing studies community has, over the past few decades, significantly advanced knowledge of issues such as housing affordability barriers, housing and health and wellbeing outcomes, housing consumption and environmental awareness, planning, comparative housing, and homelessness and housing precarity, and examined these in light of socio-spatial urban adjustments, urbanisation strategies, and societal inequalities. Housing studies has engaged with the everyday practices, political economy, institutional determinants, and financial drivers that reproduce and exacerbate failures of the housing system. These are critical advances that have enabled solutions and systems-oriented policy developments in the form of actionable policies.

Since *Housing Studies*' inception 40 years ago as a forum to 'develop an understanding of the practical and political possibilities for confronting housing questions',<sup>i</sup> the field of housing studies has come some way in considering the impacts of policies, practices, and behaviours on social and economic sustainability, and the role that housing plays in connecting institutions and people, with outcomes

and aspects of sustainability addressed in specific areas of housing studies. However it remains the case that knowledge on housing issues has blind spots, and that the link between knowledge and action - especially around systemic challenges where affordability, equity, justice, and environmental sustainability intersect - remains weak. Our knowledge remains dominated by research from and of the Anglosphere and western Europe, missing important insights which would come from a broader global perspective. And our inter- and trans-disciplinary connections are partial, with insufficient engagement across our constituencies to yield new, distinctive, and actionable knowledge centred on housing and housing policy.

These challenges inform three editorial aims and directions for Housing Studies which as Managing Editors we are committed to pursuing.

### **1. Purposeful.**

We want to urge the housing studies community to build on recent conceptual and empirical advances in our field and scale these up to develop actionable housing insights for affordability, equitability, and sustainability challenges. Housing affordability, ageing housing and infrastructure, rapid urbanisation, informality, and recognising spiritual connections to land are some of the housing issues throughout the world that remain in urgent need of solutions. Action, however, needs significant conceptual and institutional advances to ensure that outcomes are both socially and environmentally sustainable. Housing here plays a key role in linking policy and practice with societal objectives. Our aim is to remain the leading academic forum for critical examination of *every* housing question. While affordability, equitability, and sustainability in housing are recurrent themes, we welcome new areas of investigation and strive to find new ways of achieving these outcomes.

### **2. Global.**

The focus of the journal is Global. While Global South and Global North regions face common issues such as affordability, equitability, and sustainability, the specific manifestations and severity of these challenges may not only be different but also socially and spatially differentiated. Moreover, there is considerable diversity within each region, and some areas in the Global North face housing challenges similar to those in parts of the Global South, much like how novel housing experiences in the Global South can also be found in the Global North. Diversity as well as distinctiveness across Global South and Global North can provide both methodological and theoretical tools and lessons for how the field of housing studies can advance the conceptualisation, and translation into actionable insights, of the role of housing in connecting policy, practice, and behaviour with socio-spatial, political-economic, and environmental sustainability goals. We envision this journal as a leader in publishing truly *global* research on housing affordability, equitability, and sustainability challenges; and a leader in breaking away from *undue* emphasis on Anglophone and Western European experiences, sometimes embodying outdated colonial world views, in addressing global challenges.

### **3. Interdisciplinary.**

Housing Studies is an interdisciplinary journal. It is dedicated to the comprehensive examination and analysis of various interlocking aspects of housing. In placing housing at the centre of the interplay between policies, practices and behaviours, and social, spatial, political, economic, and environmental sustainability challenges, it is clear that our discipline has much to offer related academic fields. In the same way, other disciplines can provide valuable conceptual, methodological, and theoretical tools for the field of housing studies to scale up actionable insights in relation to sustainability outcomes. As

examples, Transition Studies focuses its attention on transitioning from one mode of socio-economic operation to another, particularly in relation to sustainability outcomes. Sustainability research seeks to address environmental and resource challenges, whilst creating a more equitable and sustainable world. We aspire for this journal to act simultaneously as an intellectual and practical forum for inter-, but also, trans-disciplinary analysis of housing's role in linking policy and practice systems, with affordability, equitability, and sustainability challenges.

At the same time, in developing new, distinctive, and actionable knowledge centred on housing and housing policy, it remains important not to lose sight of established knowledge in policy and housing studies. Actionable interventions and innovations implemented within pre-existing structures of inequality produced by unequal power relations, will merely reproduce and even enhance existing inequalities. Variable and pre-existing social and political-economic infrastructure of housing, furthermore, tend to interact with actionable interventions and social innovations in predictable and unpredictable ways, potentially resulting in perverse policy outcomes.

Climate and environmental challenges, if anything, heighten the intersections of the 'right to housing' with societal infrastructure requirements and the political economy of nations. Delivering actionable knowledge that addresses these challenges for housing and societies requires purposeful, global, and interdisciplinary perspectives - without losing sight of existing advances and knowledges in housing studies.

Managing Editors

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2024

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<sup>i</sup> Editorial, *Housing Studies*, 1986, 1 (1):ii.